



# Poem As Sculptor

A one day pre-visit lesson about Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” and the Statue of Liberty  
*Time requirement: 50 - 60 minutes*

## Lesson Overview:

In 1883, poet and literary critic Emma Lazarus wrote a poem that has become an unofficial motto of the United States. When she first wrote the poem it was read publicly at an auction to raise money for the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. After the fundraiser, it was almost lost to history. Emma died four years after writing the poem a generation later it was affixed to the Statue itself. Since that time the poem and the Statue have become an inseparable declaration, offering a vision of the Statue of Liberty as a “mother of exiles,” welcoming newcomers from around the world. In this pre-visit lesson, students will learn how Emma Lazarus’ “The New Colossus” influenced the world’s perspective of the Statue of Liberty. They’ll learn how the two pieces work in tandem to make a statement about America, a nation of immigrants.

## Essential Question:

- How does historical context shape the art created in a particular era?
- How can art help express and define a nation’s identity?

## Materials:

- Powerpoint presentation “The Emma Lazarus Project”
- The Statue of Liberty observation sheet (1 copy per student - OPTIONAL)
- “The New Colossus” (1 copy per student)
- Emma Lazarus identity chart (1 copy per student)

## Notes for the teacher:

*Throughout this lesson plan, you’ll find prompts to display certain slides from the presentation during particular lesson steps. You’ll also find suggested times for each lesson step.*

*You may find it helpful to watch the Emma Lazarus video before teaching the lesson to gain background information about the Statue of Liberty, Emma Lazarus and “The New Colossus.” However, we recommend that you allow students to construct their knowledge about these topics throughout the lesson.*

# Lesson Steps

## 1. Activate student thinking (5 minutes):

- a. Distribute the Statue of Liberty observation sheet & Display Slide 3
- b. Allow students 5 minutes to complete the “Do Now” activity.

*Study the image of the Statue of Liberty. On your observation sheet, record at least 5 details you notice about the statue. Then write 1 - 3 sentences answering the question “What do you think is the message the statue sends to people arriving, and the world, about the United States of America?”*

## 2. Students share responses to the “Do Now” activity (3 - 5 minutes).

Either have students share their observations and responses with the whole class or with a partner.

## 3. Teach the historical context of the Statue of Liberty (5 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 4: A Timeline of the Statue of Liberty.
- b. Have students read each point on the timeline.
- c. Ask: “Do any of the facts about the statue’s history change your opinion about the statue’s message? Why or why not?”

## 4. Define Important Terms in “The New Colossus” (5 minutes)

- a. Display Slide 5: “The New Colossus” Important Terms.
- b. Option A: Display one important term at a time using slide 5 of the presentation. Allow students to define the terms for their peers or simply read the definitions of the terms from the slide.

Option B: Distribute copies of “A New Colossus.” Read through the important definitions provided on the right side of the poem.

## 5. Read “The New Colossus” (5 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 6: “The New Colossus”.
- b. Invite students to read the poem silently as you read it aloud to the class.  
OPTION: Display Slide 7 and have the students listen to Laurie Anderson read “The New Colossus,”
- a. Allow students time to read the poem a second time to themselves.

## 6. Discuss “The New Colossus” (5-7 minutes) :

- a. Ask: What words, phrases or images from the stand out to you? Why?  
OPTIONAL: Display slide 8. Identify Lazarus’ use of the following poetic devices:
  - Allusion -- Lazarus makes reference to the ancient Greek Colossus.
  - Personification -- The statue cries
  - Metaphor -- the “huddled masses” are equated with “wretched refuse”
- b. Ask: How does the poem make you feel?
- c. What is the message of this poem?

## 6. Watch the Emma Lazarus video (15 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 9: “A Poem in Context.”
- b. Distribute the “Emma Lazarus Identity Chart.”
- c. Explain: Just like students briefly learned about the historical context of the Statue of Liberty, now they will learn about the historical context of “The New Colossus.” In particular, they will watch a video that describes the author of the poem, Emma Lazarus, and the aspects of her world that led her to write the famous poem.
- d. Direct students to record facts about Emma Lazarus’ culture, political climate, economic climate, social climate as they watch the video.  
Use the hyperlink on Slide 10 to play the Emma Lazarus video for students

# Lesson Steps

## 7. Discuss the video (5 - 7 minutes).

- a. Ask: What aspects of Emma Lazarus' life and times led her to write "The New Colossus"?
- b. Ask: Did learning more about the poet influence your interpretation of the poem? If so, how? If not, why?

## 8. Summary/ Final Analysis (5-7 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 11: Poem as Sculptor.
- b. Explain to students that they've learned that Emma Lazarus wrote her poem about The Statue of Liberty. Ask students to respond (either in writing or in discussion) to the following question: How does "The New Colossus" influence the way you view the Statue of Liberty? What message about the United States of America do the two pieces of artwork together send to the world?

## 9. Introduce Visit to AJHS (3 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 12: Becoming A Historian  
Explain to students that they will be visiting the American Jewish Historical Society, which is an archive and is home to Emma Lazarus' papers. This collection includes a handwritten manuscript of Emma Lazarus' poems.



# Emma Lazarus: Poet Activist

A one day post-visit lesson about Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” and the Statue of Liberty

*Time requirement:*

*Session One: 55-60 minutes*

*Session Two: 70 minutes (or two 35-minute lessons)*

*Session Three: 40 minutes*

## Lesson Three: Writing “A New Colossus”

In this post-visit lesson, students learned about how Emma Lazarus’s historical context and personal experiences influenced her writing “The New Colossus.” In this lesson, students will be asked to consider their own context and experiences when articulating what they believe should be America’s message to newly arriving immigrants and to the world regarding America’s attitude toward immigrants.

### Essential Questions:

- How does historical context shape the art created in a particular era?
- How can art help express and define a nation’s identity?

### Materials:

- Powerpoint presentation “The Emma Lazarus Project”
- Writer’s Identity Chart/Historical Context worksheet (1 per student).
- Writing “A New Colossus” worksheet (1 per student)

# Lesson Steps

## 1. Activate prior knowledge (5 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 14: “Do Now”.
- b. Have students respond to the “Do Now” activity: Based on our last lesson, name 3 - 5 factors that influenced Emma Lazarus leading her to write “The New Colossus.”

## 2. Share “Do Now” responses (3 minutes).

- a. Have students share their responses either with a partner or with the whole class.
- b. Explain to students that aspects of Lazarus’s identity (female, Jewish, upper class but compassionate toward poor immigrants, New Yorker, well educated, etc) led her to write “The New Colossus.” Additionally, aspects of the times in which she lived, or her historical context (influx of immigrants, building of the Statue of Liberty, post-Reconstruction Era) positioned her to write the poem, too.

## 3. Creating an identity chart (10 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 15 and distribute the “Writer’s Identity Chart/Historical Context.”
- b. Explain to students that today they will have the opportunity to write their own version of the New Colossus. However, before they begin that process, they will begin by describing aspects of their own identity and context that impacts their perspective, their opinions and their means of expression.
- c. Instruct students to begin by placing their own names in the center of the web. Then they should list *at least 7 aspects of their own identity that shapes who they are and how they view the world.*
- d. Next, they should list at least 4 aspects of their historical context that might influence the message in their poem. If necessary, provide an example of something from the current political climate, economic climate or social climate that is related to American identity or American attitudes toward newly arriving immigrants.
- e. Have students share their work with a partner or with the whole class.

## 4. Writing the New New Colossus (15 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 16: “Your task” and distribute the “Writing the *New New Colossus*” sheet.
- b. Explain the task to students: *You are being asked to write a new “New Colossus.” Your poem will take the place of Emma Lazarus’ poem on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. Your poem should, together with the Statue of Liberty, send a message to the world about America, a nation of immigrants. Your poem should be between 14 - 20 lines long and should include the use of at least 2 poetic devices.*
- c. Remind students about the poetic devices Lazarus employed in her poem (allusion to the Colossus of Rhodes, personification of Lady Liberty, imagery of huddled masses learning to breathe free).
- d. Allow students time to draft their poems. Note: Finishing the poems can be a homework assignment.

## 5. Share (7 minutes).

- a. If a few students are ready to share before the end of the lesson, allow them to share.

## OPTIONS:

- Before students write their own poems, allow them to watch poems from the 92nd Street Y poetry contest.
- Print out a selection of poems from the 92nd Street Y contest. Allow students to annotate the poems by underlining words and phrases that they feel are evocative or effective, and by crossing out words or phrases that are not. They can then replace the less effective language with words and phrases of their own.